



The Abbey

Christian Brothers' Grammar School
& St Colman's Primary School

A Mass Celebrating the Work of
the Christian Brothers in Newry
9th February 2009 6.00 p.m.
in Newry Cathedral

'Ar son Dé agus leasa na n-óg san
lúr agus sa cheantar máguaird'



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‘Ar son Dé agus leasa na n-óg san lúr agus
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‘For God and for the welfare of
young people of Newry and district’

Br. Beausang



Edmund Rice

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Junior and Senior pupils from bygone days

Historical Vignette - 'Bands of Brothers' in Newry, 1851 - 2009



At the end of 1850, the Christian Brothers responded to an invitation from Bishop Blake and the Administrator of Newry, Rev. Patrick O'Neill, to establish a school in the town, the first of its kind in the North. Br. Austin Grace, of North Richmond St. Dublin, came to Newry on 12th December 1850 to meet Bishop Blake and the Administrator. The invitation was to locate the Christian Brothers at Mount St. Patrick, Chapel St., an existing school and teacher's residence which had been endowed by the Rt Rev. D. Lennon in 1802. The teacher attached to the school was reluctant to move out and the Brothers resided with Mr James Grant until the issue was resolved in 1851. The first two Christian Brothers to teach in Newry were Br. Scannell, a native of Cork and Br. V. McDonald, originally from Liverpool.

In the nineteenth century, the school at Mount St. Patrick, Chapel Street, was a simple stone house. The Brothers lived in the upper floor, essentially a loft, and the schoolrooms were downstairs. Besides preparing the boys for the Sacraments, the curriculum in the 1850's included Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, Reading and Spelling. Lessons ran from 9.00am to 3.00pm, Monday to Friday and from 9.00am to 1.00pm on Saturdays. The two schoolrooms were known as the 'Lower School' and the 'Breakfast School', the latter being so named because the Bishop paid the expenses for providing a breakfast in the sacristy of the Cathedral for those pupils who wished to avail of it. The school was soon brimming with 'ragged, barefooted youngsters'. A stone tablet in the school bore the inscription; 'This school was erected to meet the needs of poor and destitute boys'.

Acknowledging that this may have been demoralising for the pupils the Brothers removed it about 1857. A plaque which can be seen to this day in the garage of Mount St. Patrick in Chapel St. reads as follows;

**Christian Schools,
Mount St. Patrick
Endowed by the Rt Rev. D. Lennon
A.D. 1802**



What the public would not have been aware of at the time were the noxious living conditions endured by the Brothers. The refectory, for instance, had been a home for pigs under the former school master. Tragically, if hardly surprisingly, within two years, Br. V. McDonald contracted a fever and passed away.

Dedicated to providing a service for the poor and working class, demand for education by the Christian Brothers grew rapidly, resulting in the 'Christian Schools' occupying several premises simultaneously. Significantly, Felix O'Hagan donated a site in Margaret Street for the



construction of a new school. Completed in 1865, the "Red School", or the "Carstands" as it was better known by generations of Newry boys, was a striking, red brick building and it enabled part of the Chapel Street premises to be converted into living accommodation for the now greatly expanded community of Brothers. Even this development could not cope with demand. Extra schoolrooms were found in the 'Home Rule' Hall, later St. Colman's Hall in Castle Street. In 1881, it was decided to buy the old Wesleyan Chapel in Kilmorey St. and it was opened as a school in 1882. Meanwhile, owing to high levels of sickness at Mount St. Patrick, the Brothers rented out a house in the Downshire Road.

The number of Christian Brothers teaching in Newry continued to increase and Br. Austin Dempsey was the driving force in borrowing money from the Munster and Leinster Bank to purchase additional property in Castle St. in 1903 at a total cost of £1,425. Throughout their endeavours in Newry the Brothers were fortunate in being able to rely on the practical support of the local community in various fund-raising initiatives. On this occasion, 'the women of the town organised fairs and bazaars of every kind: other people came to them with money and furniture'. The new premises in Castle St. were called "The Abbey" because the 'dwelling and the grounds occupy a portion of the old Abbey around which the town of Newry grew up'. Resources were still scant and it was a measure of the pressures on the Brothers to provide the best possible educational service,

and a reflection of their determination to do so, that it has been documented of Br. Dempsey in his dying days:

Terrible pain in his declining weeks may have stopped him from teaching in the "Carstands", but incredibly did not prevent him from conducting classes around his deathbed.

In the words of Thomas Keane, 'such heroic fortitude, combined with an illustrious career and prominent involvement in the Newry Gaelic League, explain why his passing was the subject of a newspaper editorial'.



Br. Dempsey

Not surprisingly, in the early years of the Christian Schools, in the aftermath of penal days and the famine, the Brothers encountered 'many difficulties' in striving to attain the highest academic standards. By the very early twentieth century, though, Br. Dempsey could advertise 'Intermediate and Civil Service classes' at the 'Christian Schools, Newry' as follows:

These Schools stand in the front rank of Intermediate Schools in Ulster. Amongst their successes have been some scores of Exhibitions through all the Grades:

Five Gold Medals, one Silver Medal and a very large number of Prizes in Books and Composition Prizes. Some of the highest positions at the Civil Service Examinations have been won by past Intermediate students.

While times were tough, the late Seán Crawford recalls a memorable school trip he participated in to Belfast when he finished his 'Intermediate' in the early twentieth century:

Brother Dempsey, of course, had on the silk hat, wore the long coat and carried the inevitable umbrella and brown Gladstone bag. The other Brothers sported soft hats, but every man Jack of them had his umbrella too...A few of the seniors lit up fags but 'jooked' up the train in order to escape from Brother Dempsey, who entirely disapproved of nicotine. The younger Brothers didn't mind though and even lighted the cigarettes for us.
Cuisle na nGael supplement 1994

How times have changed! Fostering high academic standards, though, continued over the generations. Reflecting on the curriculum of bygone days, the distinguished academic and author, Denis Donoghue (Warrenpoint), recently recalled studying the Christian Brothers' Latin Grammar, including 'an anthology of Virgil, Ovid and Horace and a selection of Cicero's letters and speeches'.

The poverty and challenging quality of life in general for many of the Abbey pupils in the early twentieth century is almost unimaginable today. Before the Factory Act of 1918, children, known as 'Half-timers', were eligible for half-time work from the age of eleven. Meanwhile, the Annals of the Christian Brothers for 1916 related that 'about 140 of our schoolboys are daily provided with a hot meal of soup, potatoes and bread in St. Colman's Hall'. A flu epidemic closed all the schools in 1918 and owing to the unhealthy condition of Mount St. Patrick in



The 'Abbey' celebrating a religious occasion

Chapel St., it was never re-opened. Additional property was bought next door to 'Abbey House', also called the 'Masters' House'.

Running schools on a multi-campus basis proved to be having enormous practical difficulties in a busy town. By the middle of the 1930s, the Brothers decided to build a new school to replace the "Carstands". In 1938 the 'Christian Brothers' School, St. Colman's P.E.S.' (Public Elementary School) opened, known since as the Abbey Primary. A past pupil writing in a local newspaper recalled visiting the 'splendid new school' shortly after it opened. He reflected on the 'famed teaching Order' which had 'manfully worked to instil in me a working knowledge of the 'Three R's'. The new school facilities contrasted greatly with the 'cramped little playground (in Kilmorey St.) where we sported at lunch-time almost shoulder to shoulder'. The correspondent concluded;

The Christian Brothers have always marched with time; they have never lagged in the past and today, after a century of struggle, their schools rank with the finest in the land, and their tuition with the supreme.

For some time after the opening of the Abbey 'Primary' in 1938, boys continued to be educated in local convent schools before 'graduating' to the Brothers' school, normally after having made their Holy Communion. Those students who did not pass the 'Entrance test' to the Christian Brothers' 'Secondary' school remained at the Public Elementary School until the school leaving age at the time, fourteen. (Note that such terms as 'Intermediate' and 'Secondary' have different connotations in the education system depending on the era to which they apply). At one stage, as Sean O'Driscoll recalls, the 'Entrance test' included English, Arithmetic and Geography. Pupils who passed the exam paid a fee of £4 per year. Evidence shows that the Brothers attempted to alleviate the expense for boys from poorer backgrounds. It was not unknown for pupils to pay either nothing at all, or as much as they could afford. An early twentieth century pupil recalled that:

'We paid the Brothers from twopence to six pence weekly. This meagre sum, supplemented by results fees, the proceeds of an annual sermon and a high-class concert was, as far as I know, all the Brothers had to depend on for their existence...For practically nothing, we were taught Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Tennyson, Macauley, R.L.Stevenson, Defoe, Goldsmith, Addison, Steele, Bacon and Dickens'.

Cuisle na nGael supplement 1994

Fund-raising bazaars were a regular feature of Abbey life during these Spartan times. Indeed, the Brothers paid entirely for the Assembly Hall in the Abbey 'Primary' themselves, £25,000, in order to circumvent Department



Civic dignitaries and politicians, including Joe Connellan MP and Max Keogh, Editor of the Frontier Sentinel with Br. Magee. Probably on the occasion of the Christian Brothers centenary in Newry in 1951.

of Education restrictions on using school premises for fund-raising. Against educational orthodoxy at the time, though now very fashionable, Br. MacQuillan was the inspirational force in the 1970s behind the establishment of what is known today as the Educational Centre for Physical Disabilities at the Abbey Primary. The Brothers were always selfless educational pioneers.

The 1948 Education Act opened up free grammar school education for all who passed the 11+ and this had a major impact on the development of the Abbey 'Grammar' School. Many students from its early days still talk of having attended 'The Abbey', or 'The Brothers'. One thing everyone had in common, though, was the sense that they would always be 'Abbey Boys'. With free grammar school education available, the old 'Grammar' school in Castle St. was clearly too small to cope with growing numbers. Thus, Br. Mullins was entrusted with the specific mission to build the present Grammar school in 1959. Excavation commenced in March 1963 and it was completed three years later at a cost of £260,000. Br. Newell, Principal of the Abbey Grammar School at the time, led the staff and pupils to the new premises in May 1966. It was to be 1972, however, before the new monastery on Courtenay Hill was completed, affording the Brothers 'modern' living conditions at long last after



Br. MacQuillan

over a century of enduring great privations. Once again the Brothers appreciated greatly the local community rallying around them to provide financial assistance. The Irish National Foresters in Newry who had offered generous assistance over many decades once more stood shoulder to shoulder with them. A feature of Bingo nights at the time in the Foresters' John Mitchel Hall was the presence of Br. Byrne and Br. Hynes when substantial sums of money were raised. It is a tribute to local people to acknowledge that it was not uncommon for jackpot winners to donate their prizes to the monastery building fund.

After spending 26 years in Belfast, Br. Beausang returned to serve in the Grammar school in 1981. It was...

like coming home from the high seas to calm waters. But what changes! The Abbey House was empty; the Brothers had gone to a new monastery on Courtenay Hill. My neighbours had all gone, - the Keenans, Prices, Carrolls and Campbells. Old Mrs Keenan's sweetie-shop, and Annie Dowdall's pub had vanished. And the old Abbey building looked sad and desolate.

Reflecting on his early years at the Abbey, Br. Beausang, known affectionately as 'Beau', later described life in the 'Master's House' which adjoined the 'secondary' school. He reported how the Brothers 'rose at 5.45 am, gathered in the chapel for prayer and meditation, then walked to the Dominican church for Mass at 7.00 am. There would be spiritual reading during breakfast'. Recalling how the qualifying examination for free grammar education had been introduced in 1948, he recollected that the Headmaster of the Primary School had been



Br. Hennessy, (Hennessy Park was named after him) assisted by Bros. Cloke, Gleeson, Nannery, McGreevy, MacQuillan, Skehan, Lynch and Drohan. For the most part of the time the Brothers spent in Newry they had to cope with challenging living and educational facilities. Schools, of course, even modern ones, are more than buildings. Over the decades, the Abbey schools have been manned by talented 'Bands of Brothers'. (See Appendix compiled by Sr Evelyn Kenny which features the names in alphabetical order of the Brothers who have been associated with Newry since 1851).

'Abbey Boys' have successfully pursued a whole range of occupations, many of them distinguishing themselves greatly in their chosen fields. The debt of gratitude which generations owe the Brothers is reflected in Dr Seamus McAteer's recollection of his first day as a GP in Newry in 1950. His first patient was none

other than Br. O'Donnell. Dr McAteer recalls that 'I shot to my feet' when Br. O'Donnell entered his surgery, such was his admiration and respect for the Brothers. In the area of religious vocations, several Abbey pupils achieved great eminence. Five past pupils went on to reach the episcopacy: Bishop Carroll, Bishop Crawford, Bishop Magee, Bishop Brooks, and, of course, the present Bishop of Dromore, Bishop McAreavey, while Fr. Hugh Connolly is the current President of Maynooth. From a lay point of view, the legacy of social justice and care for the underprivileged that has been inculcated in generations of Abbey students by the Christian Brothers has arguably been of paramount importance. And that charism has been perpetuated by the lay teachers and pupils who carried on the torch of Edmund Rice since the Brothers ceased to be involved in teaching. Following the Tsunami in 2004, the Abbey Primary School responded imaginatively to the suffering in Asia by



Br. Byrne

raising funds for replacement fishing boats, an act of solidarity and Christian concern that was widely praised in the media. Since the Abbey Grammar School's involvement with the inaugural 'Zambian Immersion Project' in 2003, eight teachers have volunteered to participate and twenty five pupils have won their way through a rigorous selection process to take part. Places on the 'Zambian Immersion Project' are now almost as prized by students as the university scholarships of yester-year. The spirit of Br. Byrne burns brightly.

Nurseries of sporting talent, hurling was the first sport played at the 'Christian Schools' in Newry. It was introduced by Br. Rice, a Kilkenny man. It was his idea to amalgamate the colours of Down with those of his native county to form the Abbey colours. Later, many sports stars were to don the red, black and amber jersey on a gaelic football field. Among these luminaries were Gerry Brown, Barney Carr and T.P. Murphy. 'Abbey Boys' featured prominently in Down's 'Sam Maguire' cup-winning sides, including: Sean and Kevin O'Neill, Tony Hadden, John Murphy, as well as brothers, Val and D.J. Kane. And Armagh's historic squad of 2002 abounded with former Abbey pupils, including: team captain, Kieran McGeeney, the McEntee twins, the O'Rourke and McNulty brothers, Oisín McConville, besides the manager, Joe Kernan. International soccer stars, Peter McParland and Pat Jennings, British boxing champion, Danny McAlinden and golfer, Ronan Rafferty, also featured in Abbey colours. Pat Jennings later recalled that 'I played midfield and, though I didn't realise it until a long way down the line, it was probably the best training I could have done for goal-keeping'. Under the inspirational leadership of Mr Gerry Brown and Br. Rehill, the Abbey was the first 'day' school (i.e. a school which did not offer boarding) to win the MacRory Cup in 1954.

Now, in 2009, with the Christian Brothers having completed their service in Newry, the history of the schools they founded is once more at a crossroads. At primary level, the Abbey will be renewing its links with St. Clare's in a newly amalgamated school, while the 'Grammar' will relocate to a £23m development on the Ashgrove Road where it will once again be a neighbour of the Sacred Heart Grammar School. As the last small 'Band of Brothers' (Fabian Boyle) leave, perhaps they should cast their eyes out across the 'town' and the surrounding countryside of South Down and South Armagh and, modesty permitting, indulge themselves in a quiet moment of reflection on a job well done and

gratefully appreciated by the community they served. (In leaving the Abbey the Brothers would be the first to acknowledge their appreciation of the contribution of their lay colleagues over the generations).

Having noted at the outset the names of the first two Christian Brothers to teach in Newry in 1851, it is only fitting to conclude by detailing for historical record the names of the Brothers who were in the Abbey Monastery as their sojourn in the Frontier 'Town' terminates in 2009: Br. O' Mahony, Br. M. Gleeson, Br. McCrohan and Br. Nannery. Sadly, though in other respects providentially, Br. Mallon, known to all as 'Br. Paddy', a Newry man from John Mitchel St. and later High St., passed away in 2008 shortly before the final departure of the Brothers from the Abbey Monastery. Go nDéana Dia Trócaire ar a anam.

*Agus na Bráithre ag imeacht uainn, thig leo a bheith sásta go bhfuil éacht oideachasúil comhlíonta acu ó lonnaigh siad ag 'Cnoc N. Pádraig'; Sráid an tSéipéil, níos mó ná céad go leith bliain ó shin. Shroich siad lúr Chinn Trá in am an dealúis; tá lúr Chinn Trá á fhágáil acu in am an rathúnais – is mór agus is tairbheach a dtionchar féin ar fhorbairt an bhaile idir an dá linn. Tá ár mbuíochas tuillte go maith ag na Bráithre Críostaí as a saothar 'ar son Dé agus leasa na n-óg san lúr agus sa cheantar máguaird' (Br. Beausang).
Ní bheidh a leithéidí arís ann.*

**Dr John McCavitt
and Mr Séamus Mac Dhaibhéid**

Sources and acknowledgements

The Christian Brothers' Educational Record, History of the Institute, Vol. ii; Br. Beausang, hand written notes of a lecture entitled 'Teacht na mBráithre Críostaí go lúr Chinn Trá, 1851', kindly made available by Br. O'Mahony; Article by Mr Thomas Keane in commemorative booklet on the occasion of the Abbey Grammar School's Silver Jubilee in 1991; Fabian Boyle 'Three Cheers For The Old Abbey Boys', *Newry Democrat*, 9th Dec. 2003; *Cuisle na nGael*, Newry (1986); *Mourne Rambles* by Sean Crawford, a *Cuisle na nGael* supplement (Newry, 1994); Denis Donoghue, *On Eloquence*, (Yale, 2008); Sr Evelyn Kenny kindly made available the text of a lecture delivered to the Dromore Diocesan Historical Society entitled, 'The influence of the Irish Christian Brothers on Education'; Mr P. Rocks, Mr A. O'Rourke, Mr V. Kane, Mr W. Morgan, Mr S. O' Driscoll, Mr K. Higgins, Mr T. Gorman, Mr M. Grogan, Mr J. Rath, Dr S. McAteer. Br. McCrohan generously afforded his time and knowledge in the completion of this synopsis.



Br. Beausang

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS IN NEWRY

1851 - 2009

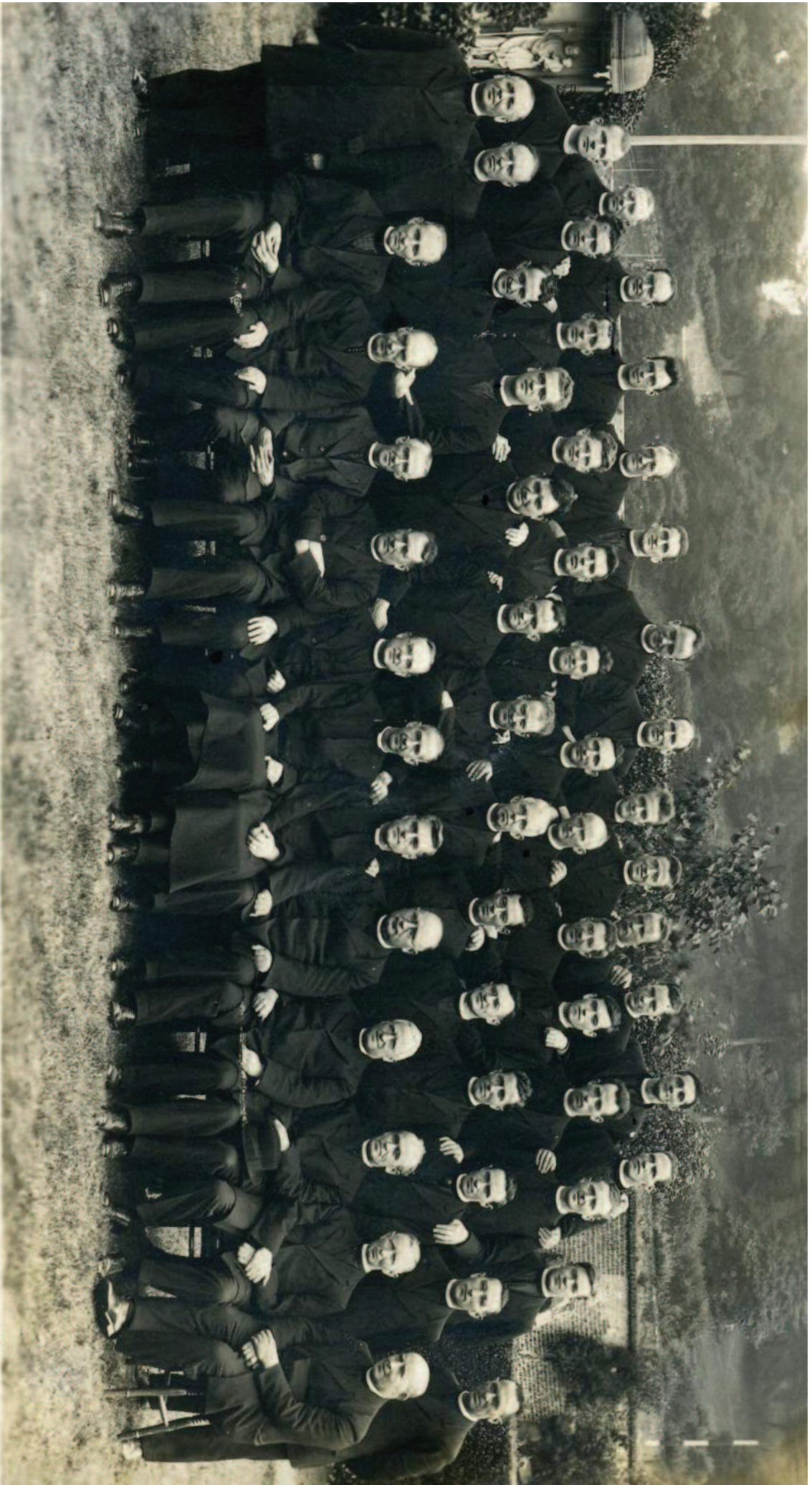
Compiled by Sr Evelyn Kenny.

Br. Aherne	Br. Garvey	Br. Long	Br. Noone
Br. Andrews	Br. Gaynor	Br. Lynam	Br. Ó Briain
Br. Athy	Br. Geoghegan	Br. Lynch	Br. O'Brien
Br. Barry	Br. Gibbons	Br. Magee	Br. O'Byrne
Br. Beausang	Br. Gibson	Br. Maher	Br. Ó Caithnia
Br. Begley	Br. Gillen	Br. G. Mallon	Br. O'Connor
Br. Bowe	Br. D. Gleeson	Br. Paddy Mallon	Br. O'Doherty
Br. Boyle	Br. M.C. Gleeson	Br. Maynes	Br. L. O'Donnell
Br. Burke	Br. X. Gleeson	Br. Markey	Br. M. O'Donnell
Br. Butler	Br. Glynn	Br. Minogue	Br. C. O'Donoghue
Br. A. Byrne	Br. Grangel	Br. Moloney	Br. G. O'Donoghue
Br. L. Byrne	Br. C. Grant	Br. B.A. Monaghan	Br. O'Flaherty
Br. Callan	Br. G. Grant	Br. F. Monaghan	Br. O'Hara
Br. Canton	Br. Greene	Br. Mullins	Br. O'Keefe
Br. Carlin	Br. Harney	Br. B. Murphy	Br. A. O'Mahony
Br. Carroll	Br. Hatchell	Br. T.B. Murphy	Br. T. O'Mahony
Br. Clifford	Br. Hayes	Br. W.O. Murphy	Br. A. O'Neill
Br. Cloke	Br. Heffernan	Br. Murray	Br. S. O'Neill
Br. Coleman	Br. Hegarty	Br. McAdam	Br. O'Reilly
Br. Comerford	Br. Henley	Br. McCloskey	Br. Peppard
Br. Connolly	Br. Hennessey	Br. McCourt	Br. Power
Br. Cosgrove	Br. Hickey	Br. McCrohan	Br. Quinlan
Br. Costello	Br. Hoctor	Br. D. McDermott	Br. Quinn
Br. Cotter	Br. Holian	Br. J.C. McDermott	Br. Rehill
Br. Cowley	Br. Houlohan	Br. J. McDonald	Br. Rice
Br. Crummy	Br. Hynes	Br. V. McDonald	Br. A. Ryan
Br. Cunningham	Br. Keegan	Br. E. McDonnell	Br. B. Ryan
Br. Curran	Br. A. Kelly	Br. R. McDonnell	Br. C. Ryan
Br. Dargan	Br. B. Kelly	Br. McDonogh	Br. D. Ryan
Br. Dempsey	Br. C.V. Kelly	Br. McFarland	Br. F. Ryan
Br. Devlin	Br. G. Kelly	Br. McGoldrick	Br. J. M. Ryan
Br. Donald	Br. L. Kelly	Br. McGreevy	Br. Scannell
Br. Donovan	Br. Kennedy	Br. McLoughlin	Br. Scully
Br. Drohan	Br. Kenny	Br. McNamara	Br. Skehan
Br. Duggan	Br. F. Keogh	Br. MacQuillan	Br. Stack
Br. Dunleavey	Br. M. Keogh	Br. McSwiney	Br. Thompson
Br. Eustace	Br. R. Keogh	Br. Nagle	Br. Tuohy
Br. Farrell	Br. Kilkenny	Br. J. Nannery	Br. Tynan
Br. Finlay	Br. John Ledwidge	Br. M. Nannery	Br. Wilden/Wilders
Br. Fennell	Br. Lellis	Br. Newell	Br. Woods
Br. Fitzsimons	Br. Leonard	Br. Neylon	Br. Yorke
Br. Gallagher	Br. Liston	Br. Nolan	Br. Young

The Old Newry Society presents

'The History of the Christian Brothers in Newry in Words, Images and Music'

in the Abbey Grammar School
on Wednesday 18th February 2009 @ 8pm



THE ABBEY. NEWRY. AUGUST 27TH. 1932.